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Shall we remodel our church interior?

American Seating Co.

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American Seating Company
Grand Rapids 2, Michigan

FOREWORD

IN TODAY'S great and gratifying renascence of religion, many congregations are discovering that they have outgrown their churches. The proud edifice so carefully planned one, or two, or perhaps three generations ago is no longer adequate, physically or spiritually.

If your house of worship gives increasing evidence of failure to meet today's requirements, members are probably asking each other, "Shall we remodel our church interior?"

The answer must consider many factors. It is not uncommon for a growing group to dispose of its existing property to some smaller congregation, perhaps of a different denomination, and build a new church in a more favorable location. But if your present site is desirable, and if your church is structurally sound — as pioneer churches usually are — you may well be giving serious thought to remodeling and modernizing. This will call for consideration of new furniture and new seating. The next question usually is, "Where shall we turn for the kind of furnishings our church deserves, and the kind of help we need in planning?"

American Seating Company offers this booklet in the hope that it may help you answer that question. This company has been designing and manufacturing fine church furnishings for more than 65 years. It has been privileged to serve many of America's most distinguished churches, as well as countless small neighborhood centers of worship. Whether it be a "little church around the corner" or a great metropolitan cathedral, each American Seating installation benefits by the authenticity of design, the integrity of

craftsmanship, and the true economy of long, faithful service, which have combined to make this company leader in the field.

Because the very nature of our work calls for closest harmony with architects and contractors, you will find in the following pages helpful suggestions relating to your choice of these all-important factors in your planning.

You will also find useful case-history information, and a discussion of the many elements entering into a choice of furnishings. Please understand that our experience and our facilities are offered to you and your architect with the hope and belief that they will help solve your remodeling problems.

AMERICAN SEATING MASTER CARVER AT WORK

SHALL WE REMODEL OUR CHURCH INTERIOR?

In the past few years, the construction and the remodeling of churches have reached record proportions. The religious revival of the past two decades has been the most significant cause. A constantly growing population and the great industrial expansion, with the consequent rise of our living standards, have also been strong factors. All indications are that this building activity must continue in order to meet growing needs.

Many churches will build new structures in the near future. Many more will turn to rehabilitation programs for the solution of their problems. We hope to offer in this booklet some assistance to those who are considering the renovation of their church. The problems involved are difficult, and their solution requires considerable effort. But the rich rewards that can thus be won are even greater.

PURPOSES OF A REMODELING PROGRAM

Though many of the older churches were substantially built long ago and are still structurally very sound, *two basic needs* arise. The most obvious is more space. The second is the restoration or improvement of the religious atmosphere of the church interior. One is concerned with the physical requirements of the congregation, the other reflects the spiritual needs. These two phases cannot be treated separately, however, if we are to arrive at the best and most complete solution to the problem.

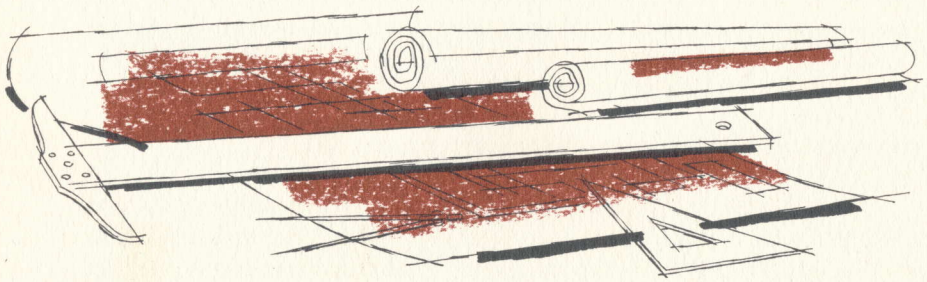
When we analyze the design and arrangement of these older churches, we realize that they were built to serve people living in times quite different from ours. In some cases, even the ritual or service was of a different form. Thus, today, we are not surprised to find that these churches often fail in their primary function — that of providing the proper religious atmosphere to inspire the reverence belonging to every house of worship.

When a congregation must consider expanding its facilities, an excellent opportunity is afforded for bringing the whole interior "up to date," and giving it greater religious meaning. A remodeling program has a twofold purpose: First, to improve its worshipful atmosphere. Second, to provide adequate accommodations for seating the congregation, and proper facilities for the conduct of an orderly and dignified service.

Of all the various types of buildings renovated from time to time, the church is the most complicated and the most difficult to plan. Because so

many factors must be considered, the task is a challenging one. For the inexperienced, it is virtually impossible to deal with this task effectively, because of the many intangibles to be considered.

We speak of dignity, devotional atmosphere, reverence. Just what are these things, and how are they to be accomplished? Normally, the enlarging of a church edifice does not pose an insuperable problem. The seating capacity can be increased, new seats can be installed, a new pulpit or altar can be purchased. But it is entirely possible to have a larger building with new furniture inside, which yet falls short of being truly a place of reverence.



The factors of spiritual and physical requirements are inseparable. Even the last pew in a far corner of the church, in addition to providing a comfortable seat for a number of persons, must also make its contribution to the religious feeling by its design, color, and the material of which it is made. It is of the utmost importance that in planning even the most minute details of the program, one must not lose sight of the religious or spiritual effect — which is the ultimate goal.

The solution of these problems will require thoughtful planning. If it is possible to set down any basic rule to be followed in this preparatory stage it could be this: TAKE YOUR TIME!

No church renovation was ever any better for having its plans made hurriedly, for haste can lead to mistakes and oversights. Once the reconstruction work is actually begun, it progresses more rapidly today, with our present methods and technical skills, than it would have only a few years ago. This allows us to take more time in our planning, but it also poses a serious threat if we do not. Often, if even a small change or revision in the plan is desirable, the work has progressed so rapidly as to make the change either impossible or very costly. So the entire success of the endeavor is dependent upon the thoroughness with which the plans are made.

SOURCES OF ASSISTANCE IN PLANNING

To achieve best results, it is necessary to seek the help and services of persons and organizations trained and experienced in the field of church planning. The average member of a building committee is not likely to be called upon to help in such a program more than once in his or her lifetime. Hence, to a large extent, the services of experienced, professional people must be employed.

The most important sources for this advice and service are the architect, the contractor, the interior decorator, and the furniture contractor.

THE ARCHITECT

The architect spends many years in a thorough study of the many phases of his profession. In his training, he has followed the development of the styles, functions and principles of construction of every type of building, from the earliest forms down to the present. His study of architectural styles has provided him with a knowledge of the political and social life, and an insight into the religious thought of the periods in history that each style represents. He has become an expert in the use of new building materials, techniques and economies that are constantly being developed. In his design

training, he has learned the rules of form and function, the use of ornament and texture, proportion and balance, and the rules and theories of color harmony.

The architect will work out the best possible solution to the complex problems of a church-remodeling program. The service he offers is complete. He has, either in his own office or at his disposal, the technical services of other professionals, such as church architectural designers, structural engineers, plumbing, heating and electrical engineers, and interior decorators. In the architect's hands and under his guidance, the total effort has its best guarantee of success. A study of his qualifications will show the advantages to be gained, and will indicate the risks of a "do-it-yourself" approach.

THE BUILDING CONTRACTOR

What the architect's services offer in the planning of the project, the building contractor provides in the physical effort required to execute the program. He is the agent who will carry out the archtitect's plans to the smallest detail. He has the responsibility of seeing that not only the structural but the artistic concepts are translated into material fact. He will insist that the work be well done, and the materials used to the best advantage. The contractor has the proper tools and equipment to do the work efficiently and economically. Most of all, he offers the advantage of long experience in this trade and the workmanship of skilled artisans.

Where funds are limited, there is a strong temptation to effect certain "economies" by attempting to do either the planning or the work — or both

— without outside help. Experience has proved, time and again, that this leads to disappointment and jeopardizes fulfillment of the goal sought. Indeed, economy is one of the *advantages* gained by using the services of the architect and the contractor, for men of their experience have a thorough knowledge of costs and possible savings in every phase of the project.

Where considerable redecoration is required after the remodeling is done, the architect will often assume the responsibility of making recommendations. Especially where much painting is to be done, the decorating scheme must be subordinated to the architectural treatment.

If an interior church decorator is engaged, it is most important that he work closely with the architect.

AMERICAN BODIFORM PEW
WITH CARVED PANEL

THE FURNITURE MANUFACTURER

Although the installation of the furniture is normally the culminating phase of the entire program, it is so closely allied with the architectural treatment in the creation of a worshipful atmosphere, that it would be a grave mistake not to give it full consideration in the initial stages of the planning.

At the outset, the church-furniture manufacturer can be of valuable assistance to both the building committee and the architect. The reliable manufacturer will offer many services of a highly specialized nature. This manufacturer will have a competent staff of designers with a broad knowledge of church architecture and art, specializing in the creation of designs for church furnishings that are both functional and in keeping with the archi-

tectural style of the building. This manufacturer will also offer a complete planning service for arrangement of the furniture to suit the religious requirements of the individual church, and for the proper spacing of the seating to insure maximum capacity with greatest comfort for the congregation.

All too often a church building is remodeled at considerable expenditure of time, effort and money — only to fall short of the ultimate purpose because of failure to choose furnishings of design and quality in keeping with the other results obtained. If there is to be a truly religious atmosphere in a church, primary consideration must be given to the design and function of the furniture. For the people who will attend the church, the furniture will be their first and most constant physical contact; and the impression it leaves, good or bad, will be the longest lasting.

EXPERIENCE, FACILITIES, PLANNING

For the foregoing reasons, the greatest care must be exercised in choosing the furniture contractor. There is no substitute for experience and for the knowledge gained from it. This means many years of successful activity in the designing and manufacturing of high-quality furnishings. Whether or not a company has this qualification can readily be determined by its reputation and the record of its past performance. The company chosen must have the proper manufacturing facilities, for a craftsman is no better than his

BEFORE

"tools." Modern equipment is a "must," as is also the use of the best methods and materials, and employment of expert craftsmen.

Finally, the task of co-ordinating the work of all concerned is primarily the responsibility of the architect. Indeed, what would be the logic of calling upon an architect to plan the entire program, if he were not to be given the opportunity to see that his designs were carried out? A policy that permits several individuals to attempt to guide such a program invites conflicting instructions, duplication, and confusion.

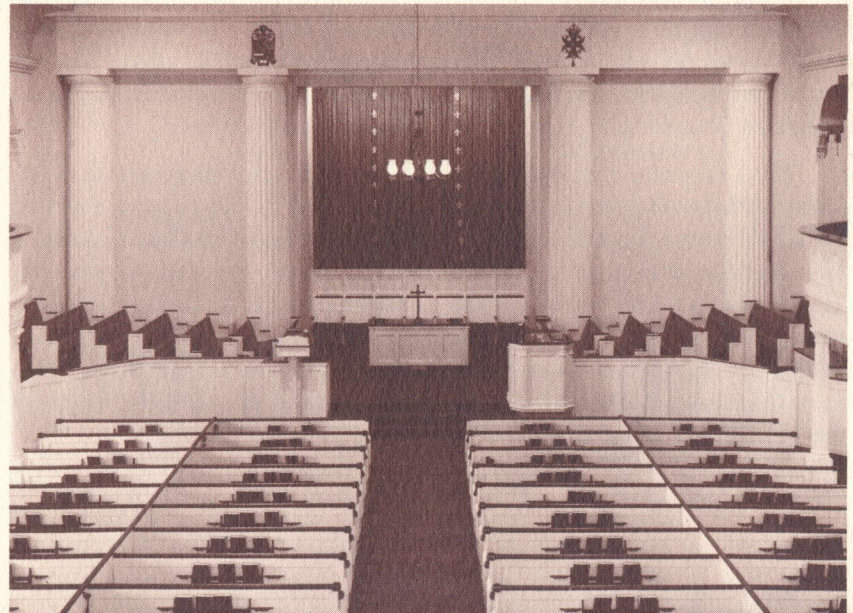
DESIGNING YOUR CHURCH INTERIOR

RESULTS OF ONE REMODELING PROGRAM:

Thus far, our discussion has dealt chiefly with the remodeling of churches where certain structural changes in the building were required. However, it often happens that good results can be obtained simply by replacing old furniture, providing a new and more functional arrangement, and by redecorating the interior. In such cases, much of what has been said still holds true — especially with regard to the architect's services.

But the success of this type of renovation depends entirely upon the treatment of the furniture requirements. It is surprising what excellent results can thus be achieved. As an example of what can be accomplished, note these photographs of the Reformed Church at New Paltz, New York.

AFTER



Even after careful study of the before-and-after photographs, it is hard to believe that both were taken in the same church. Here, indeed, the architects were faced with a unique problem!

This congregation was organized in 1683. The first stone church was built in 1717 and replaced by a larger one in 1773. The congregation continued to grow steadily, and by 1839 it was necessary to build the present church, a fine example of Georgian Colonial style of architecture.

In 1951, a firm of architects was commissioned to plan the remodeling of the interior. The architects were limited, however, by a restriction against making any major structural changes in the building. Preliminary plans were made, and the American Seating Company was called upon to assist in the effort and to manufacture the new furniture. The combined efforts and the complete co-operation of the architects, the general contractor, and the furniture designers, with the full support of the church committee, produced the outstanding results seen on page 9.

CREATING A WORSHIPFUL ATMOSPHERE

In the creation of a worshipful atmosphere in a church, the most important factor is unity of design. The entire concept of the New Paltz renovation is evidence of this. Beauty inspires reverence. And this beauty can only be attained by the proper correlation of all parts to an over-all effect.

Thus, the first factor that the furniture designer must consider is the architectural style of the building; otherwise a conflict will be set up that even the untrained eye will detect. Gothic furniture, for example, cannot serve in a Classical or Colonial building. Nor can Colonial furniture fit a Gothic church, or Romanesque in a church of contemporary design.

For a furniture design to be compatible with a particular style of architecture, it is not necessary to reproduce, exactly, all the ornamental detail of the style. It may be as elaborate or as simple as desired, provided it possesses the form and character of the style used. In some cases, our purpose can be aided by contrast. If an interior is very ornate, it is often practical to treat the design of the furniture more severely. If an interior is very plain, it might be appropriate to add well-chosen ornament to relieve the severity. In contemporary design, this contrast is often attained through the thoughtful use of color and texture.

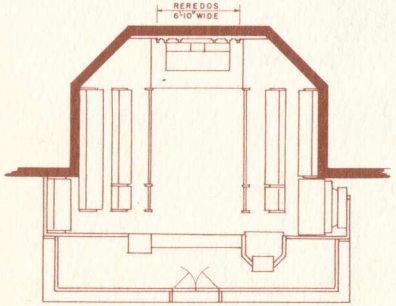
DESIGN AND FUNCTION

Along with the design of the furniture, we must consider its function. Every church service is conducted according to a ritual, whether it be simple or elaborate in form. It is in this conduct of the religious service that the individuality of the church becomes evident. Two churches of different denominations could be identical in style and form on the outside, even possess the same religious atmosphere in the interior, but have a marked difference in the arrangement of the furniture on the platform or in the chancel. This difference gives the church its individual character. And this can only be accomplished by thoughful planning of the furniture arrangement.

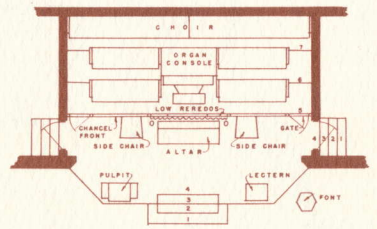
In the ritual of some of the older churches, it often happens that certain changes have been made or new ceremonies have been added, for which no provision has been made in the furniture arrangement. Here much thought must be given to the purposes the furniture will serve.

The platform or chancel arrangements most commonly used can be grouped under these headings: formal, semi-formal, and informal. Typical examples of these three types are sketched below. The formal, or "divided" chancel is rapidly becoming the most favored plan.

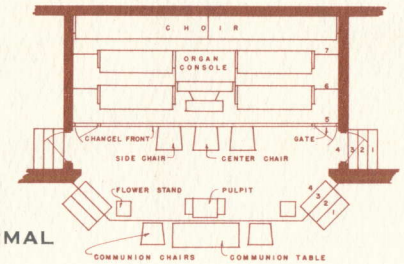
Many variations of these plans can be made, to serve any particular need.



FORMAL
(OR DIVIDED) CHANCEL



SEMI-FORMAL



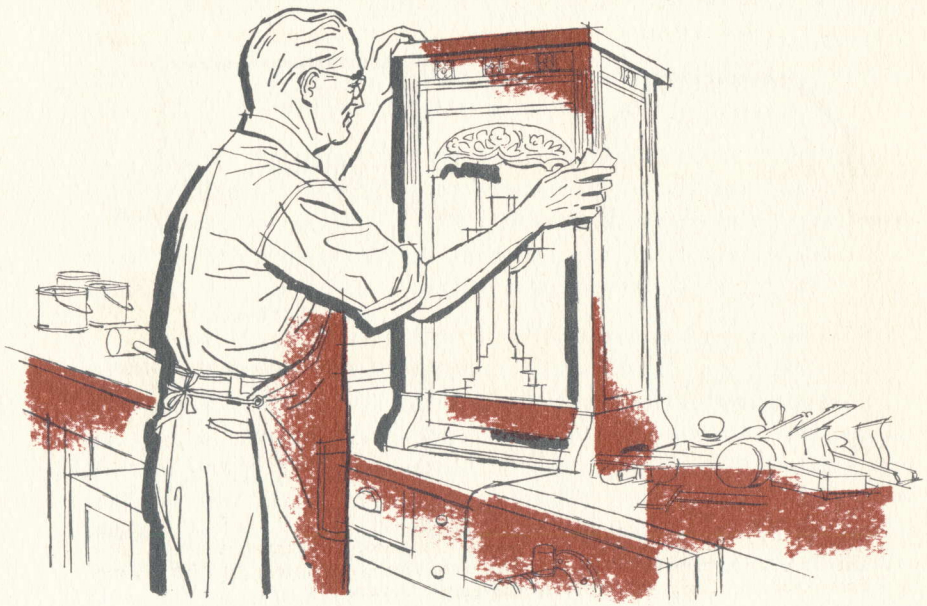
INFORMAL

QUALITY OF CHURCH FURNISHINGS

Our final consideration regarding the furniture to be placed in the church has to do with its manufacture. Just as in the remodeling of the church building, the work of the committee and the thoughtful planning of the architect can be in vain if the workmanship and the materials used are inferior. If the job is worth doing at all, it is worth doing well.

One important fact should be remembered in all planning of furniture needs: no matter what design or arrangement is chosen, the furniture must give many years of service. If it fails in the rugged test of time and use, it will not be worth the time, effort and expense involved — regardless of how cheaply it has been purchased.

Outfitting a church is not like purchasing the goods we use in everyday life, which are replaced frequently. The refurnishing of a church is normally done only once. Signs of poor workmanship and faulty construction will long reflect against the judgment of those responsible for placing it in the church. Criticism will be sharpened when costly repairs or replacement become necessary at an early date. In the final analysis, the only true economy is in quality.



SYMBOLISM

Any discussion of church-building, remodeling or furnishing would not be complete without a few words about the universal language of Christian symbolism. There are many ways in which to adorn a church building or its furnishings, but if this is done without recourse to the symbols of religion, the result may very well be earthly and uninspiring. Admittedly, such ornament is entirely the work of man, and, beautiful as it may be, it will not necessarily elevate the soul to spiritual striving. Yet, is not such a lifting of the soul the primary purpose of the church? If there is any assurance that a church will have a worshipful interior, it lies in the well-planned use of symbolism as a contribution to it.

The possibilities for the use of symbolism in a church are endless. They can be used separately to convey their own individual meaning, or they can be grouped to reflect an entire concept of some religious truth. They can be arranged in sequence to give a chronological account of some part of the Bible. Symbolism is not limited to any one denomination or to any particular style of architecture.

Illustrated here are a small number of the more commonly used Christian symbols, with descriptions of their meanings. To be truly effective, any symbol must be authentically reproduced as well as expertly executed. This is especially true if it is to be carved out of wood and incorporated into the design of the furniture.

SOME WIDELY USED SYMBOLS

LATIN GREEK MALTESE CROSS PATEE CELTIC

The Cross

The supreme symbol of Christianity. Represents Our Lord, His Passion, Our Redemption. There are many forms of the cross. The Latin Cross, the Greek, the Maltese, the Cross Patee, and the Celtic are a few of the better known.

IHS — The first three letters of the Greek word for "Jesus."

XP — The first two letters of the Greek word for "Christ."

AO — The Alpha and Omega. The first and last letters of the Greek Alphabet — refers to Rev. 1-8, where our Lord said "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending . . ." — meaning that Our Lord is the beginning and end of all things.

The Circle — Eternity. Without beginning and without end.

The Triangle — The Trinity.

The Trefoil — The Trinity.

The All-Seeing Eye, in a triangle — The omnipresence of God.

The Hand in a Cloud — The Hand of God in the act of creation.

The Serpent Around the Globe — The spread of sin.

The Rose — The Messianic promise.

The Lamb of God — A symbol of Our Lord.

Sheaf of Wheat — The Bounty of God.

Grapes and Vine — Our Lord, the True Vine.

The Fish — A symbol of Our Lord.

Greek	English Equivalent	Greek	English
I	I	IESOUS	JESUS
X	CH	CHRISTOS	CHRIST
Θ	TH	THEOU	OF GOD
Υ	U	UIOS	THE SON
Σ	S	SOTAIR	SAVIOR

CONCLUSION

We have touched upon the more general aspects of the problems of remodeling an existing church structure: First, the objectives sought; secondly, the nature of the problem; and, lastly, the solution of the problem.

A discussion of this subject could be carried into much more detail than the limits of this booklet permit. To do so, we should have to take into consideration the wide diversity of conditions that exist — the form of the building, the style of its architecture, and the special problems that exist in the different denominations. No two churches have the same individual problems — which is why we have stressed the importance of seeking the help of well-trained and experienced people.

Responsibility for the final accomplishment of a remodeling program rests with the building committee. Although the planning and the work will be done by others, the guiding force is provided by those chosen to represent the interests of the church community. The committee is the liaison between the clergy, the congregation, and those commissioned to do the work. Perhaps a committee's most important function is to gain a full understanding not only of the physical needs of the church, but also of the deeper, spiritual needs of

their people. No other human endeavor, however sincere, possesses the strong motives and deep spiritual longings that find expression in the creation of a beautiful church.

Whatever treatment is chosen for the remodeling of the church interior, it must reflect the spirit of the congregation, their special needs, and their desires. Most of all, it must be the fulfillment of their dreams of a church in which they may pray more devoutly and give greater honor and glory to God.

For those who are responsible for this accomplishment, there is, indeed, a great reward — not only in the gratitude of their people but, what is more important, in the deep satisfaction of having had a part in the enrichment of their spiritual life.

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